

Public Information Policy

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Approval Signature: /s/ Mary Sexton, Director

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Policy Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to facilitate the dissemination of information so that the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) communicates openly and honestly with the public of Montana regarding DNRC's purpose, principles, projects, and accomplishments. DNRC will pursue a positive public image by increasing the flow of information; taking a proactive stance with regard to dissemination of information about all aspects and activities of DNRC; and involving Montana citizens in its decision-making processes to the fullest extent possible, in accordance with applicable laws.

I. Definitions

- A. "Communications Plan" means the plan that contains DNRC's public information goals and objectives.
- B. "Director" means the director of the DNRC.
- C. "Leadership" means the director, deputy director, chief legal counsel, and division administrators of the DNRC.
- D. "News release" means a written message that is prepared for and distributed to the media by the following methods:
 - 1. electronically;
 - 2. personally; or
 - 3. regular mail.
- E. "Public Information Officer (PIO)" means the person who, at the discretion of the director, is responsible for oversight of all DNRC media activities.
- F. "Public information request" means a request by a member of the public to inspect and/or copy DNRC records, as allowed by state and federal law.
- G. "Public notice" means notification to the public by the DNRC of its projects and efforts, in compliance with statute, policies, and administrative rules.
- H. "Public service announcement (PSA)" means a written message, similar to a news release, that is prepared for and distributed to the media, specifically the radio and television media, by the following methods:
 - 1. electronically;
 - 2. personally; or
 - 3. regular mail.

II. Media and Public Relations: DNRC's policy is to develop and implement a strong media and public relations program for the good of DNRC.

A. Oversight of DNRC Media and Public Relations

1. The PIO, under the direction of the director and deputy director, is responsible for oversight of all DNRC media activities.
2. The PIO is responsible for providing timely information to all internal and external stakeholders and the public about DNRC operations, policies, and decisions. Maximizing the flow and content of information will help ensure that DNRC is better understood and received by the public.
3. The PIO will provide assistance, guidance, and/or oversight to media activities that occur at the unit, area, or regional level.

B. Media Inquiries and Requests for Interviews

1. Under the director's approval, the deputy director, division administrators, chief legal counsel, and/or appropriate unit, area or regional level staff may give interviews to, or respond to questions from the media concerning informational matters. The PIO must be notified of all media contact (see [DNRC Media Contact Form](#)).
 - a. Inquiries concerning policies of the current administration shall be referred to the director or director's designee.
 - b. The director, deputy director, division administrators, and chief legal counsel may delegate responsibility to respond to media inquiries or interviews to bureau chiefs, area managers, regional managers and other employees on specific projects, issues, or topics as appropriate.
 - i. Such delegation should, but is not required to be in writing.
 - ii. Division administrators are encouraged to plan ahead for issues of public interest.
 - iii. As soon as practicable, the designated employee should inform the supervisor and PIO of any media inquiry or interview and the responses and written information provided.
2. Any employee who is contacted regarding media inquiries or requests for interviews shall refer the request to his/her supervisor. The supervisor will then:
 - a. advise the employee to answer the inquiry;
 - b. answer the inquiry themselves;
 - c. refer the inquiry to the next level of supervision; or
 - d. refer the inquiry to the director, deputy director, PIO, or other knowledgeable employee who can answer the media inquiry.
3. Seasonal employees must forward all media inquiries to their unit or program manager, unless approved by the area or regional manager in advance to respond to media inquiries or requests for interviews.

C. News Releases, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), Outreach, and Public Appearances

1. News release: DNRC regularly issues news releases announcing such things as changes in policy, public hearings and meetings, availability and awards of grant and loan funds, timber sale information, and other matters that affect or solicit input from the public.
 - a. The PIO oversees all DNRC news releases and works with DNRC staff members to generate, review, or disseminate news releases about DNRC projects, events, or decisions.
 - b. Drafts of all news releases pertaining to interpretation of DNRC policy or controversial situations must be sent to the PIO for review prior to release. If there is a question about the accuracy, format, or content of the news release, the PIO will notify the author and consult with the director and the responsible legal counsel. The PIO and author will determine the appropriate recipients and distribution methods.
 - c. The PIO will ensure that all news releases are sent to the webmaster (see Section VI) for posting on the website.
2. Public service announcements: A PSA is similar to a news release in that it is a written message that is prepared for and distributed personally, via e-mail, or mail to the media—specifically the radio and TV media. DNRC regularly issues PSAs for such activities as public hearings and meetings, availability and awards of grant and loan funds, fires, emergency exercises, and other matters that affect or require input from the public.
 - a. The PIO oversees all PSAs and works with DNRC staff members to generate, review, or disseminate news releases about DNRC projects, events, or decisions.
 - b. Employees who have been designated by their division administrator are authorized to prepare and distribute public service announcements pertaining to local, routine, non-policy matters (such as fire prevention messages, road closures, burning conditions, and flood preparedness announcements). A copy of each public service announcement shall be sent to the PIO for informational purposes.
 - c. The PIO will ensure that all news releases are sent to the webmaster for posting on the website (see Section VI).
3. Outreach: DNRC employees are encouraged to anticipate opportunities to disseminate information about DNRC. Each division and regional/field office is encouraged to develop a positive working relationship with its local media representatives.
 - a. An employee who is appearing on behalf of DNRC shall present factual information within his or her area of expertise and respond as helpfully as possible to questions and requests. The employee will explain DNRC's official position, rather than state a personal position, and report the details of the interaction to his or her immediate supervisor.

- i. If an individual or member of the media has a question related to an area outside of the employee's expertise and authority to respond to media inquiries, the employee will offer to find the answer and convey that to the questioner.
 - ii. The employee (if able) will provide DNRC's official position if a question posed relates to DNRC budgets, policy, or positions on issues. The employee will not provide a personal opinion. If unable to accurately answer the question, the employee will then offer to find the answer and convey that to the questioner.
 - b. Employees who wish to make public appearances or testify as private citizens must make those appearances during off-duty hours, and must make clear that they are representing their own personal views, not those of DNRC.
4. Emergency Situations: DNRC's policy is to keep the public informed to the fullest extent possible in the event of fire, flood, or other dangerous situation.
- a. Employees working with local emergency and law enforcement agencies should determine in conjunction with the local officials who will release information. The DNRC representative will be responsible for keeping the director, division administrator, and DNRC PIO informed. If additional public information resources are needed during an emergency, the DNRC PIO will serve as a backup.
 - b. In the case of joint projects involving two or more agencies or organizations, the procedure for information dissemination will be developed by the consensus of the group. A copy of each news release shall be sent to the DNRC PIO for informational purposes. If additional public information resources are needed, the DNRC PIO will be available to assist on request

Partial Policy

Complete policy

available on request